



## DON'T SHORTCHANGE YOUR STUDENTS! 3 WAYS TO ASSESS AND REMEDIATE LEARNING GAPS

By Sachet Lawrence Crooks

One of the biggest educational concerns in our nation is the loss of instructional time for our students due to COVID-19 school closures, as if summer break wasn't already a brain killer throughout the ages. This causes twice as much instructional time to be lost and leaves us screaming in our heads: How can I get my students on track?! If we continue with our curriculum as if nothing ever happened, how will students catch up?

We can't conduct school like business as usual. In my school district in DeKalb County, Georgia, we are also unsure of the future, but we are advised that we need to teach a grade lower the first 2 weeks of school. For example, since I teach sixth grade, I need to teach fifth-grade content for 2 weeks to help remediate and refresh students' memories. Whether this is enough cannot be known, but we can do some things to alleviate the stress.

### **Have a plan.**

As previously stated, our school districts do not yet know what the future holds; even my own principal does not know how the school year will look,

**As you prioritize all the things on your to-do list, consider what areas are framing your principal's and parents' judgment of your practices.**

and that's part of the problem. How can we plan for what we don't know?

But there is hope. As my principal advised, we know that at least part of our instruction will most likely be virtual because things will not be the same for a long time, and we must plan for that. Think of it this way: We are heading into a more technological era anyway; in fact, we are already there, and it behooves us to prepare ourselves so we are ahead of the pack. Consider the way you would usually plan a unit or lesson plan: Keep it, but remember the following:

- Make sure you have a digital component or alternative in case you have to teach online or use an online platform. For example, ReadWorks is a website that allows you to assign reading passages and comprehension questions to all students and monitor their progress simultaneously. If you need an option for use inside the classroom, you can simply print the articles and questions. Also, as is commonly the case, some students may not have access to a computer.
- Use resources that automatically grade assessments and activities to make your life easier. ReadWorks also grades assessments for you, as do a host of other websites, including Google Forms, which allows you to create your own assessment.

### **Use resources that offer adaptive learning.**

- Zearn: This program provides a combination of classroom instruction and adaptive online math lessons for Grades K–5. Start with whole-class lessons, then allow students to work individually or in pairs on digital lessons. Finally, group students based on a detailed report of their progress. Use this information to remediate or extend learning.
- CommonLit: This website offers free literary and nonfiction reading passages for Grades 3–12, assigns students comprehension questions that promote rigor in reading and writing, and analyzes student performance, providing reports on reading and writing skills.

### **Adapt strategies you already know to meet student needs.**

- Before your lesson: Preteach difficult vocabulary or concepts and provide outlines, worksheets, or guides.
- During your lesson: Have students take notes, repeat directions, share information.
- If a student has difficulty expressing themselves verbally, allow them to draw, write, or demonstrate.
- If a student has difficulty expressing themselves in writing, allow them to do multiple choice, matching, true/false, demonstrating, or reading.
- Instructional arrangement: If group work does not work for some students, have them work in pairs or independently.
- Physical or social environment: Allow a student the choice to sit at a desk, chair, table, or quiet space.
- Alter assignments and teaching methods to fit student needs.

So, don't stress out; there's no such thing as impossible. We can do this! Have a plan, make sure it's flexible, implement it as best you can, tweak it as needed based on the everchanging circumstances, breathe, and push ahead. You do not have to dumb down content in an effort to make up for what they seem to be lacking. Use these resources and curate your own so you can meet students where they are and allow them to grow from there. You will look back a year from now and be surprised at how far you and your students have come. 🍎

#### **Resources**

**CommonLit: Free reading passages and literacy resources**  
commonlit.org

**ReadWorks**  
readworks.org

**Zearn Math: Top-rated math program created for teachers**  
zearn.org



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